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ABSTRACT

To help teachers, policy analysts, and others understand the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Assessment in Reading, this journal issue presents the objectives and examples of how students in grades 4, 8, and 12 will be assessed. The issue discusses NAEP's view of reading; key features of the assessment; reading purposes; reading stances; and question types and allocation of testing time. A table listing aspects of reading literacy in the 1994 NAEP assessment, and a table presenting the distribution of items and percentage of assessment time by question type and grade are included. (RS)

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Focus on NAEP

Vol. 1, No. 1 January 1994

1994 NAEP Assessment in Reading

In early 1994, many students across the nation will participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading. To help teachers, policy analysts, and others understand the assessment, this edition of *Focus on NAEP* presents the objectives and examples of how students in grades 4, 8, and 12 will be assessed. The framework that guides the assessment was developed in 1989–90 through a national consensus process involving experts in reading, teachers, business representatives, policymakers, and others who brought national, state, and classroom perspectives to the discussion.

NAEP's View of Reading

Contemporary research indicates that reading is a complex activity involving an interaction among the reader, the text, and the context in which something is read. It is an active process of building understanding rather than a passive process of simply recognizing words and ideas.

In line with this orientation, the 1994 NAEP reading assessment framework, unchanged since 1992, emphasizes performance measures that require students to move beyond mere surface understanding and demonstrate the ability to examine the passage's meaning and extend it through personal knowledge and experiences.

Key Features of the Assessment

- Assessment of students' ability to read for three general purposes: reading for literary experience, reading to gain information, and reading to perform a task;
- Selection of longer and authentic reading materials (such as short stories, poems, articles, and essays), reproduced as they appeared in their original publications, to assess reading as it is actually used in and outside the classroom;
- Selection of texts reflecting the tremendous cultural and topical diversity in reading materials;
- Open-ended (or constructed-response) items that allow students to demonstrate their ability to provide complex responses to what they read; and
- An opportunity for students in grades 8 and 12 to select one of seven short stories from *The NAEP Reader* and to respond to open-ended questions about it.

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Dimensions of the Assessment

The 1994 NAEP reading assessment framework defines two dimensions for the assessment—reading purposes and reading stances. These are summarized in table 1.

Table 1.—The 1994 NAEP assessment in reading: Aspects of reading literacy

	Constructing, extending, and examining meaning			
	Initial understanding	**Developing an interpretation**	**Personal reflection and response**	**Demonstrating a critical stance**
Reading purpose	Requires the reader to provide an initial impression or unreflected understanding of what was read.	Requires the reader to go beyond the initial impression to develop a more complete understanding of what was read.	Requires the reader to connect knowledge from the text with his or her own personal background knowledge. The focus here is on how the text relates to personal knowledge.	Requires the reader to stand apart from the text and consider it.
Reading for literary experience	What is the story about?	How did this character change from the beginning to the end of the story?	Is this story similar to or different from your own experiences?	How does this author's use of ____(irony, personification, humor) contribute to____?
Reading for information	What does this article tell you about_____?	In what ways are these ideas important to the topic or theme	Does this description fit what you know about____? Why?	What could be added to improve the author's argument?
Reading to perform a task	What is this supposed to help you do?	What must you do before this step?	Describe a situation where you could leave out step X.	Why is this information needed?

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment Governing Board, *Reading Framework for the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress*, 1994.

Reading Purposes

The NAEP reading assessment framework recognizes that readers think and use text differently, depending on the types of text and the purpose for reading. For example, a reader skims a phone book or airline schedule for specific information but may stop and reread phrases of a novel to consider their meaning and how they reflect the author's style.

- *Reading for literary experience* involves

  —Reading novels, short stories, poems, plays, and essays;

  —Exploring the human condition and the interplay among events, characters, emotions, and possibilities;

  —Knowing what and how an author might write in a specific genre and use writing techniques such as figures of speech;

  —Looking for how the author explores or uncovers experiences; and

  —Engaging in vicarious experiences through the text.

- *Reading for information* involves

  —Reading articles in magazines and newspapers, chapters in textbooks, entries in encyclopedias and catalogs, books on particular topics, and the like;

  —Being aware of the features found in informative text, such as charts, footnotes, diagrams, subheadings, and tables; and

  —Acquiring information for different purposes, such as specific information when preparing a research project or general information when glancing through a magazine article.

- *Reading to perform a task* involves

  —Reading practical documents such as bus or train schedules; directions for games, repairs, classroom, and laboratory procedures; tax or insurance forms; recipes; voter registration materials; maps; referenda; consumer warranties; office memoranda; and the like;

  —Recognizing the purposes and structures of practical documents to guide selection, understanding, and application of information;

  —Looking for information to do something, rather than savoring the style or thought in texts as in reading for literary experience; and

  —Applying, not simply understanding, the information.

Reading Stances

The NAEP reading assessment exercises are designed to tap four essential responses readers need to be able to make to what they read: initial understanding, developing an interpretation, personal reflection and response, and demonstrating a critical stance. These stances or orientations have been observed in discussion and uses of reading materials. They are not a hierarchy of skills—every reader, regardless of age or level of achievement, should be able to use them. What changes with readers' growing proficiency is the complexity and thoroughness of their responses and the difficulty of their reading materials.

- *Initial understanding* requires the reader to

  —Provide an initial impression or global understanding that does not require much analysis of what was read;

  —Consider the text as a whole or in general rather than specific parts; and

—Respond to questions such as: Write a paragraph telling what the story or poem is about. Which of the following is the best statement of the theme of this story? Write a paragraph telling what this article generally tells you. What is this supposed to help you do? What would you tell someone about the main character?

- *Developing an interpretation* requires the reader to

—Extend initial impressions to develop a more complete understanding of what was read;

—Link information across parts of a text as well as focusing on specific information; and

—Respond to questions such as: How did this event affect the course of the plot? What caused the character to do this (use examples from the story to support your answer)? What caused this event? What type of person is this character (use information from the text to support your answer)? In what ways are these ideas important to the topic or theme? What will be the result of this step in the directions? What does this character think about____?

- *Personal reflection and response* require the reader to

—Connect meaning from the text with the reader's own background knowledge and experiences; and

—Respond to questions such as: How did this character change your ideas of____? How is this story like or different from your own experience? Explain. What current event does this remind you of? Explain. Does this description fit what you know about____? Why? What would you do about the problem discussed in the article? What information from other books or your own knowledge helped you answer this?

- *Demonstrating a critical stance* requires the reader to

—Stand apart from the text and consider it objectively as written text;

—Critically evaluate text, compare and contrast types of writing style or genres, and understand the impact of such features as irony, humor, and organization; and

—Respond to questions such as: Compare the style or tone of this article or story to that one. Does the author use (irony, personification, humor) effectively? Explain. What could be added to improve the author's argument? Why? Is this information needed? What other information would you need to find out?

In addition, the assessment contains questions requiring readers to make connections across parts of a text or between texts. For example, students might be asked to compare a poem and a story with the same theme or to relate information from a first-person account to a textbook description of an event.

Question Types and Allocation of Testing Time

The 1994 NAEP reading assessment includes a mixture of multiple-choice, short-constructed-response, and extended-constructed-response items to tap a range of reading responses. *Short-constructed-response items or tasks* require a limited range of inferences and connections usually in a phrase or a few sentences. *Extended-constructed-response items or tasks*, on the other hand, require multiple inferences or connections in a short or long paragraph and are scored according to specific criteria. Thus, the range of possible answers is greater in extended-constructed responses. The type of question is determined by its content. Students participating in the NAEP reading assessment take different subsets (or blocks) of test items, and no individual student takes the entire test. Across all blocks, question types are distributed as shown in table 2.

Table 2.—Distribution of items and percentage of assessment time, by question type and grade

Grade	Question type					
	Multiple choice		Short-constructed response		Extended-constructed response	
	Number of items	Percentage of time	Number of items	Percentage of time	Number of items	Percentage of time
4	39	37	37	38	8	25
8	41	21	65	45	16	33
12	44	22	72	47	16	31

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment Governing Board, unpublished data, 1994.

References

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment Governing Board. *Reading Framework for the Assessment of Educational Progress.* Washington, D.C.: 1994.

Note

Focus on NAEP is a new series that briefly summarizes information about the ongoing development and implementation of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The project director for *Focus on NAEP* is **Sheida White**. This issue was prepared by **Sheida White**, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and **Barbara Kapinus**, The Council of Chief State School Officers. Readers are invited to comment by contacting the project director at: NCES, Education Assessment Division, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20208–5653. To order other NAEP publications, call Bob Clemons at 301–763–1968.

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